



Market and Trade Data

The French Market for Kosher Foods

By Laurent J. Journo and Roselyne Gauthier

France is Europe's leading market for kosher foods — with the continent's largest Jewish community, an even greater number of mainstream consumers who buy kosher products, and a substantial kosher food industry. The FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs in Paris, France, considers the kosher market to be a promising market niche that could be more fully exploited by U.S. exporters.

Sales in the European kosher food market are estimated at \$6 billion per year. France has annual kosher product sales of \$549 million, and also serves as an international trading center for kosher products. Imported and domestic kosher items are distributed not only in specialized kosher stores, but also in the largest supermarkets in France and across Europe.

Less than 30 years ago, France's kosher food market was considered a niche ethnic market; but it has grown by an average of 16 percent per year since the late 1990s. In the past 10 years, 71 percent of French supermarket chains have introduced kosher products and established kosher sections.

Leading French brands are also considering the growing kosher market. Several companies, including Yoplait, Flodora, Andros, Epi, Daregal, and Ancora-Maille, offer a range of kosher items. In addition, French manufacturers have begun to modify the taste attributes of some kosher products to increase their mainstream appeal. Many retailers have added kosher products to their mainstream lines.

What Constitutes Kosher

To be recognized as kosher, products and ingredients must be certified by a certifying agency with a rabbinical affiliation, and product manufacturing processes must conform to kashrus regulations (Jewish dietary laws).

In France, several organizations (each of which has its own logo) handle kosher supervision and certification. Here are the major ones:

- Beth Din de Paris (under the supervision of the Grand Rabbi of Paris), which certifies over 60 percent of French kosher food establishments
- Rabbinate of Louvain-la-Neuve



U.S.-style kosher restaurant

Photo courtesy of the FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs, Paris, France

- Rabbinate of Marseille
- Beth Din de Lyon
- Beth Din de Strasbourg
- Rabbinate of Moselle

However, some rabbis who do not belong to any of these organizations certify kosher products under their own names.

In addition, rabbis who do belong to these supervision organizations may certify kosher products under their own names.

U.S. kosher certifications are strong marketing advantages. The logos of major U.S. kosher organizations (OU, OK, Star-K, and Kof-K) are recognized in France. The OU and OK organizations are the widely recognized; they have participated in important French trade shows and have branch offices in Europe. In fact, so well known are U.S. kosher certifications that in the last few years, a number of French suppliers and wholesalers have attempted to have their food products approved by a U.S. kosher certifier as part of an effort to export to the United States.

France and other European countries have no equivalent of the major U.S. kosher certifiers. To remedy the situation, the Consistoire de France is working on a new certification: ECK.f (European Central Kashrus France), which it hopes will become a standard throughout Europe. However, given the great number of supervision agencies and rabbis that certify kosher products, it will be a challenge to develop consumer awareness and recognition of a single kosher certification.

What Consumers Want

France's Jewish community is comprised of two main groups: the Sephardim from Mediterranean basin countries including Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia, and the Ashkenazim from Northern and Eastern European countries. The religious calendar drives kosher food consumption in the French Jewish community, increasing around such holidays as Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkoth. In addition, personal and family celebrations (birthdays, births, weddings, bar and bat

mitzvahs, etc.) and professional events contribute to increased consumption in the Jewish community.

But in the mainstream market, kosher food consumption takes place throughout the year and is not subject to seasonal influences. The mainstream market, which accounts for about 60 percent of kosher food demand, includes:

- Muslims and other ethnic or religious groups;
- vegetarian and lactose-intolerant consumers, who purchase significant amounts of kosher pareve products (prepared without meat, milk, or their derivatives); and
- consumers who select kosher products for taste, cultural traditions, high quality, or sanitation.

The most popular kosher products in France are grocery products, beverages, dairy products, fish, frozen foods, and fresh catering products. Consumers base their purchasing decisions on the certification logo, list of ingredients, taste, and packaging. It should be emphasized that the flavors and packaging of some traditional kosher foods made in the United States do not suit the tastes or meet the requirements of the French market.

Keys to the Retail Sector

Wholesalers are key to France's kosher sector. They buy large quantities directly from producers and manufacturers, and resell to distributors, supermarket chains, specialty stores, and small outlets in neighborhoods with large Jewish populations. Most distributors must use wholesalers to offer a wide array of certified kosher products. Several distributors handle 90 percent of the market's kosher products.

U.S. suppliers who want to penetrate the French kosher market must also approach these wholesalers. The FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs in Paris maintains a list of the wholesalers, available to U.S. companies on request.

The best prospects for kosher food sales are gourmet-style products such as wines, matzos, sauces, snacks, soups, crackers, confectionery items, and vegetarian dishes. However, as noted above, U.S. suppliers must research the French kosher market thoroughly to determine whether they need to modify their products to suit consumers' tastes and meet market requirements.

e-Sources
<p>FAS Paris:</p> <p>Source of Market Assistance and Information</p> <p>The FAS Office of Agricultural Affairs in Paris, France, can assist U.S. suppliers interested in this market. For assistance, contact the office at: E-mail: aqparis@usda.gov</p> <p>For information on the French market for U.S. kosher items, visit the office's website: http://www.amb-usa.fr/fas/fas.htm</p>
<p>Trade Show Key to Marketing Kosher Foods</p> <p>FAS Paris also recruits and accompanies French buyers to Kosherfest, the main kosher trade show held in the United States. For information on the show, go to: http://www.kosherfest.com/06/public/enter.aspx</p>

Keys to the Food Processing Sector

The 10 largest French kosher food manufacturers produce and distribute kosher foods throughout Europe. In general, local kosher products are more price-competitive than imports. Kosher food producers are launching new products, such as biscuits, dairy foods, candies, and even organic, health, and specialty ethnic foods.

The best way for U.S. ingredient suppliers to target the French kosher food processing industry is either to work directly with the food processors or through wholesalers. In fact, kosher wholesalers in France that supply both the retail and food service sectors contact food processors to determine their needs.

Market surveys indicate that France needs a large and varied supply of imported food ingredients and intermediate products to meet the current large demand and to accommodate market expansion. Opportunities exist for U.S. suppliers of additives,

preservatives, flavorings, spices, condiments, sauces, citrus products, and nuts. There are also opportunities for any ingredient that could be used to make a number of processed products, such as snacks, soups, crackers, confectionery items, and vegetarian dishes. ■

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